



**Statement by Doug Sutherland
Washington State Commissioner of Public Lands
Aquatic Reserve Status of Six Sites on State Aquatic Lands in Puget Sound**

After a year of environmental review, the Aquatic Reserve Program was established in September 2002. The program will provide the Washington State Department of Natural Resources with a process to designate Aquatic Reserves on state-owned aquatic lands that have unique or high-quality ecological features and habitats. The objective is to protect and support these aquatic systems and functions.

Aquatic reserves are an important part of creating healthy aquatic ecosystems in Puget Sound. Reserves can help support a connected system of habitat throughout the state that is important to our salmon runs and other aquatic life. The reserve program will contribute to a good balance between healthy ecosystems, economic opportunity and opportunities for public enjoyment of the state's aquatic lands.

DNR's Aquatic Reserve Program staff have presented recommendations for further action on six aquatic reserve sites. The Aquatic Reserve Technical Advisory Committee (Committee) evaluations of the six sites are the basis for staff recommendations to me. The Committee evaluated the sites based on the criteria established for the Aquatic Reserve Program.

I have accepted the Committee's report. It is clear that their work was done with an open mind, following sound science, and that clearly understood the goals of this important program. I want to thank them for their time and good work.

Final decisions about the reserves have not been made. I have directed DNR staff to prepare proposals for establishing the reserves, and associated management plans. Those proposals will be reviewed under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and the criteria in DNR's rule concerning aquatic reserves, WAC 332-30-151, before final decisions are made. The following is a summary of my recommendations for further actions for the six sites.

Maury Island

In recognition of the considerable environmental qualities of this site, the Committee recommended management of this site as an Environmental Aquatic Reserve. I recommend proceeding with the development of a management plan for the site and the SEPA evaluation of the Committee's recommendation and the management plan. In developing a plan to protect the environmental attributes of this site, the following should be considered:

- Existing and pre-existing activities in Quartermaster Harbor and along Maury Island.

- Existing zoning designations for mineral extraction, including the future consideration of the proposed mine barging operations along the east-shore of Maury Island. Proposed activities should be reviewed to determine how and if they could be conditioned to ensure the conservation of the habitat and features of the site, while primarily serving the objectives of the reserve designation.
- Further examination of the three boundary options are in figure 2 in of the Committee's recommendation report.
- Concerns and interests of adjacent property owners and user groups including the public, business, Tribes, and private landowners.

Olympic View and Middle Waterway

The Committee recommendation is to not manage these sites as Environmental Aquatic Reserves at this time. I concur, and request that staff proceed with the SEPA evaluation of the Committee's recommendations and consider the following alternative options for these sites:

- DNR should consider withdrawing each site from leasing in recognition of the potential environmental benefits from restoration activities underway at these sites.
- Future consideration of these sites as educational or scientific reserves. While these sites do not presently meet the Environmental Aquatic Reserve criteria, they appear to be potential candidates for other categories of Aquatic Reserve status in future years. Future consideration as an educational or scientific aquatic reserve would be contingent upon an adequate long-term educational curriculum or research plan sponsored by an educational institution, government agency, or other appropriate organization with long-term management capabilities.

Fidalgo Bay

In recognition of the considerable environmental qualities of this site, the Committee recommended this site to be managed as an Environmental Aquatic Reserve. I am recommending proceeding with development of a management plan for the site, a SEPA evaluation of the Committee's recommendation, and the management plan.

In developing a management plan to protect the environmental attributes of this site, I ask the following to be considered:

- Concerns and interests of adjacent property owners and user groups, including the public, business, Tribes, private landowners, Port of Anacortes and the City of Anacortes.
- Consider removing the harbor area from within the boundaries of the reserve.
- Consider removing the state waterway from within the boundaries of the reserve.

Cypress Island

In recognition of the considerable environmental qualities and excellent condition of this site, the Committee recommendation is to manage this site as an Environmental Aquatic Reserve. I recommend proceeding with the development of a management plan for the site, SEPA evaluation of the Committee recommendation, and the management plan.

In developing a management plan to protect the environmental attributes of this site, the following should be considered:

- Whether the re-lease of the three salmon-net pens in Secret Harbor could be conditioned under certain circumstances to primarily serve the objectives of the reserve designation.
- Respect private property and the access to private property on Cypress Island.
- Concerns and interests of adjacent property owners and user groups, including the public, business, Tribes, and private landowners.

Cherry Point

In recognition of the considerable environmental qualities of this site the Committee recommended this site be managed as an Environmental Aquatic Reserve. I request the Aquatic Reserve Program to proceed with the development of a management plan for the site, conduct a SEPA evaluation of the Committee's recommendation, and the management plan.

In developing a management plan to protect the environmental attributes of this site, the following should be considered:

- Boundaries of the reserve should not create a barrier for navigation and access to the commercial docks.
- Examining the waterward boundary of the reserve to determine if the deep-water boundary should follow the photic zone (approximately –70-foot depth at mean lower low water) or 0.5 miles beyond extreme low tide.
- Concerns and interests of adjacent property owners and user groups including the public, business, Tribes, and private landowners.

The recommendations for all six sites will be reviewed separately under the SEPA. Management plans will be developed for the four sites recommended as aquatic reserves. At a minimum, these plans will include methods to prevent conflicting land use activities in or near the reserve through lease actions.

DNR also will develop information necessary for me to evaluate the recommendations under the criteria in the rule concerning reserves, WAC 332-30-151(4). That includes an evaluation of whether the proposed reserve conflicts with other current or proposed uses, and if so, whether the reserve best serves the public benefit. After SEPA review, the nominations will be accepted or rejected by me based on the information gathered during the SEPA process and the following criteria:

- The site will accomplish the purpose as stated for each reserve type.
- The site will not conflict with other current or projected uses of the area. If it does, then I must make a determination as to which use best serves the public benefit.
- Management of the reserve can be effectively accomplished by DNR or by assignment to another governmental agency or institution.